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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KINGSTON 000797

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR (BENT) AND WHA/PDA  
STATE ALSO FOR INL/LP, EB/TPP, EB/IFD  
STATE ALSO FOR CA/OCS/ACS/WHA HALDANE  
STATE PASS OPIC FOR TABERNAKI  
CUSTOMS MIAMI FOR LOWEN AND MAHABIR  
SANTO DOMINGO FOR FCS, FAS, AND LEGATT  
STATE PASS USTR FOR A. GASH-DURKIN  
DOJ FOR OPDAT/ R LIPMAN  
TREASURY FOR L LAMONICA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EFIN](#) [ECON](#) [JM](#) [KCOR](#) [KCRM](#) [EINV](#) [EAID](#)  
SUBJECT: KINGSTON POL/ECON ROUNDUP: MAR 5-17, 2005

[1](#)1. This week's topics:

-- Date Set for West Kingston By-Election  
-- A New Record? Crime Rate up 49% from 2004  
-- Shooting at Funeral; Finance Minister Unharmed  
-- JLP Councillors Sue Government over Toll Bridge  
-- 11 Cubans Rescued Near Jamaica  
-- Jamaica Hosts African Diaspora Conference  
-- GOJ Reduces 2004/05 Budget  
-- Cement Company To Create New Jobs  
-- State Minister Upbeat About Tourism Prospects

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Date Set for West Kingston By-Election  
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[1](#)2. On March 16, the Prime Minister announced that by-elections in the West Kingston constituency would be held on April 13. Former JLP leader Edward Seaga represented West Kingston, which includes the Tivoli Gardens community, for 43 years, and residents are fiercely loyal to the opposition party. The area is considered a safe seat for recently elected JLP leader Bruce Golding, who needs a seat in the House of Representatives to formally assume the role of Opposition Leader. The Prime Minister exercises sole discretion in calling election dates, and many expected he might delay to exclude Golding from upcoming parliamentary budget debates. JLP leaders were publicly pleased with the Prime Minister's timely action. Golding will run against the PNP's Joseph "Bunny" Witter, though a JLP victory is widely held to be inevitable.

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A New Record? Crime Rate up 49% from 2004  
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[1](#)3. The Jamaica Constabulary Force reported 342 murders in the period January 1 to March 13, 2005. The number of homicides represents an increase of more than 49% compared with the same period in 2004, and is more than double the 2003 figure. 2004 saw the highest crime rate in Jamaica's recorded history, with a total of nearly 1,500 murders from January through December. The rate, approximately 57 per 100,000 citizens, made Jamaica, along with South Africa, the world's murder capital.

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Shooting at Funeral; Finance Minister Unharmed  
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[1](#)4. On the afternoon of March 13, Finance Minister Omar Davies attended the funerals of two murdered constituents. Newspapers reported the following day that gunmen had "begun a shooting spree" at the second funeral. According to the U.S. Law Enforcement Development Advisor, some mourners took refreshments from street vendors without paying as they entered the church. The vendor subsequently called some "friends" to question the mourners, causing a crowd of mourners to confront the vendor. As the confrontation escalated, the finance minister's bodyguards fired their weapons into the air to disburse the crowd. Upon hearing the gunfire, the vendor's friends returned and opened fire into the parking lot to "intimidate" the mourners. No one was injured or arrested, and the investigation is ongoing.

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JLP Councillors Sue Government over Toll Bridge  
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[1](#)5. The debate over a new toll bridge across Kingston Harbor became politicized when three Jamaica Labor Party (JLP) councillors on March 14 filed suit against the government in the Supreme Court. The Kingston Harbor Bridge was built in the 1960s to serve Portmore, a rapidly

growing commuter community west of Kingston that now has nearly 200,000 residents. As part of the government's Highway 2000 project, the bridge will be replaced by a six-lane toll bridge. Portmore residents first protested the amount of the toll (approximately USD 1.00), but now object to the toll entirely and, after weeks of dispute, have filed a suit claiming that the government's plans violate the constitution, which protects citizens from the arbitrary expropriation of property. James Robertson, deputy leader of the JLP, described the court filing as "just the beginning" of what he expects will be "a protracted battle against the government."

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Eleven Cubans Rescued Near Jamaica  
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16. On March 16, eleven Cuban nationals were rescued by the crew of a Bahamian cargo vessel 85 miles off the northern coast of Jamaica. The Cubans, whose boat was reported to have been sinking, were taken into custody by the Montego Bay police and offered accommodation at the Freeport police station. In interviews with the police, the Cubans, all of whom are males between the ages of 27 and 46, were said to have been found to have fraudulent travel documents. The men, who remain in police custody, claimed to be traveling to Mexico, and it is unclear whether the United States was to be their final destination. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will decide their fate.

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Jamaica Hosts African Diaspora Conference  
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17. On March 16, Prime Minister P.J. Patterson addressed an audience at the opening ceremony of the South Africa, African Union, and Caribbean Diaspora Conference, held at the Jamaica Conference Center in Kingston. Patterson described the event as an opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties between African countries and the Diaspora, and for those countries to pursue a unified position for their own social and economic empowerment. Citing their shared historical experience, Patterson encouraged attendees to insist that poverty, disease, and illiteracy "be resolutely addressed at long last," pointing to poverty as a major cause of environmental degradation and resource depletion. He added his own conviction of the "compelling need to reform, rebuild, and improve the work of the United Nations," and the "urgent need to alter the design and function of the Security Council." In his remarks, Patterson outlined a Pan-Africanism for the new millennium and touched on the HIV/AIDS pandemic, adverse effects of globalization, and African conflicts sparked by "the hegemony of western nations." In attendance were representatives from 15 Caribbean nations and delegates from South Africa and the African Union, including the South African Foreign Minister, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma.

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GOJ Reduces 2004/05 Budget  
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18. With only two weeks to go before the end of fiscal year 2004/05, the GOJ has tabled its second supplementary budget estimates. The new estimates will reduce the expenditure budget for 2004/05 by USD 55.7 million, bringing spending back in line with the original budget of USD 5.4 billion (the first supplementary estimates increased the original budget by USD 54.1 million). The second estimates increased recurrent expenditures (used for day-to-day housekeeping) by USD 3.6 million, but reduced capital spending by a further USD 60.7 million. The reduction in expenditures could be part of the Finance Ministry's attempt to reign in the fiscal deficit, which surged to USD 525 million, or USD 82 million above the target for April to January 2005.

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Cement Company To Create New Jobs  
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19. Caribbean Cement Company, through its USD 100 million expansion project, expects to create over 600 construction jobs. The project to increase production capacity from 750,000 to 1.2 million metric tons of cement will create jobs for skilled workers such as masons, carpenters, plumbers, painters and steel framers. However, Anthony Haynes, managing director of the local company, has stated that only certified workers will be allowed to work on the project. In this regard, the company has partnered with the National Training Agency to provide a USD 164,000 training program for residents in the various skills.

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State Minister Upbeat About Tourism Prospects  
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110. Wykeham McNeil, State Minister of Tourism and Industry, is upbeat about Jamaica's tourism prospects for 2005. McNeil said his Ministry expects over 1.5 million stopover visitors and about 1.1 million cruise visitors. The Minister based his projections on the increased investments in the industry, which he expected to translate into thousands of new hotel rooms and attractions. McNeil also pointed to the number of new airlines now flying into the island.  
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